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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

What a great week, but I have to say that it's hard to imagine that the unofficial beginning of summer is rapidly approaching, with Memorial Day coming up next week! It's actually been a great spring season, if we can manage to overlook late March and early April - at least here in New England! Regardless, I always look forward to Memorial Day weekend. I get my gardens prepped and planted, open the pool (perhaps), and plenty of cookouts on the barbecue! I'd normally also include having a few brews, but I'm supposed to cut down on alcohol. I won't tell if you don't!

A great week, but a tiring one. I returned to the golf course this week, for three days. It wasn't bad, but tough getting back in the routine of getting up before the crack of dawn, and starting work at dawn! But, it's getting easier. It's been fun being back there, though. Nice to be outside in the sun and warmth!

And then it's back at the store at the end of the week. A little easier, not having to be on my feet all the time, all week. We'll see how it goes. And hopefully, these work changes might help play a positive impact on my overall health, as well.

So, while I kick back and relax from a long week, I hope you'll do the same and enjoy this week's issue!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and we're barreling toward the unofficial start of summer, Memorial Day, next weekend. The weather has been... interesting.. to say the least... something about the combination of temperature, rain and whatever else has provided us here in the northeast with a bumper crop of tree pollen. I've never had problems with tree pollen allergies before, but I'm suffering this time around. I

know it's not just me, because I hear a lot of people mentioning it, and a lot of people are suffering a lot more from it than I am.

I had a routine checkup this past week, and the doctor wasn't surprised at all when I mentioned sinus/allergy issues. "Everyone's got them this year" is all he said... To be fair, he did give me a sample of a prescription nasal spray that seems to be helping a bit. Other than that, I don't know that there's a lot else to be done... other than moving to the Antarctic where there is no (or at least very little) pollen.

So to let the other shoe drop, my blood pressure and cholesterol medications seem to be doing their respective jobs, and the doctor is happy with the results. Yay! The doctor is happy. [grin]

Well, enough about me.

There are a couple of things I want to talk about this week, and I'll bet you can guess what they are already, but I'm going to pick one and stick with it: The disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. And yes, it IS a disaster. There's no other way to say it. That hole in the ocean floor a mile below sea level is spewing hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude oil into the ocean every day... think about it... that's a lot of oil. Even according to BP's early estimates of 5,000 barrels of oil a day, that's 250,000 gallons of oil a day... more than a thousand gallons of oil every hour, more than 400 gallons of oil a minute, 7 gallons of oil every second. And THAT is a LOW estimate.

BP now says that this tube they've inserted into the gushing pipe is taking on 5,000 barrels of the load a day... what they'd originally said was being blown into the water... and there's STILL lots and lots of oil escaping... I haven't heard a good estimate, but you can see for yourself at the government's "spill-cam". The poor government server as been swamped since they started providing the feed, but you can try to make use of it anyway at:

<http://globalwarming.house.gov/spillcam>

So what are we doing to try to stop this monster that we've created? Well, we're spending millions of dollars to make concrete and steel 'caps' that don't seem to be working out, we've done the equivalent of inserting a straw into the mouth of a coffee can and pumping what we can up to a ship, we're making plans to blast this sucker full of mud and hoping that that'll plug it up until we can cover it over with concrete, and we're looking at drilling a 'relief well' at sometime in the future. And y'know what? I don't think anybody really has a clue as to what's going to work.

One of the things that bothers me... well, it ALL bothers me, but one of my real concerns is this "chemical dispersant" that they're belching out into the ocean to break the oil up... It's never been a secret that this stuff is toxic. Although, they say, not as toxic as the oil itself. But I wonder. The oil will, eventually, break up and break down. I haven't heard anyone say the same of this dispersant stuff. Have you?

Now, I'm not saying that I think that its a good choice to do nothing, but I wonder what we're letting out of the box with this latest round of "fixes" to try to fix the things we screwed up by trying to fix something that we screwed up.

The day of the explosion on the platform, the day 11 people died, and a couple days after that when the platform... "fell over and sank into the

swamp"... and again a couple of days after that when we 'found out' that this well was indeed leaking... spewing oil into the Gulf, I remember thinking, "Yeah, where are all you people chanting 'Drill, baby, drill' now?"

And sure enough, people who had been all for drilling off the coast, be it the west coast or east coast or the southern coast, they're all saying "Oh, no, we can't do THAT... Look at the mess it made!"

To them... to Governors Jindal and Schwarzenegger and all the others like Sarah Palin and Dick Cheney and the whole Bush family, I say... D U H ! Did you REALLY think that there was no chance that any of this was going to come back and bite us on the butt? Did you really think that a company... any company... could be trusted to STOP trying to make millions of dollars a day because of a dead battery? Did you think that they would have the conscience to step up and take the heat for the mess?

Corporations don't HAVE a conscience. A conscience is something that, so far, only a living, breathing individual can have. I'm not saying that corporations can't be a force for good, but even in the best cases, they are only tools... the real root of that 'good' is a person or group of people who decide to use this particular tool for a purpose.

And yes, BP will be made to clean up the mess, but rest assured that they will do everything they can to cut down on their liability. That's just what corporations do. Look at Exxon. The Exxon Valdez spill was decades ago and even though there is no doubt about who or what caused the damage to Prince William Sound... even though the courts have repeatedly ruled that they're liable and are required to pay damages, they haven't "paid up".

And do you know why? It's not because they think they're blameless. It's not because they think the amount is unfair. It's because they are a corporation. An intellectual construct... a.. made-up entity. We can't expect them to be imbued with the same qualities as a person, and what it 'understands' is the longer it waits, the more time they can put between the "spill" and when they actually "pay up", the less that money is going to be worth... If the courts said that they were liable for two and a half billion dollars, that amount will be worth much less down the road due to inflation. Instead of being the equivalent of six months' worth of profit, it'll be worth about six HOURS' worth of profit if they can just wait long enough.

And the damage to the coastline in states like Louisiana and Mississippi and Florida... heck, the possibility of damage to every state ON the coast... not to mention the possibility of the oil reaching the coast of Mexico and the Central American countries or those in the Caribbean.. the cleanup costs will be huge! It will make what Exxon is supposed to pay look like pocket change.

And now we hear that there's a possibility that the oil could possibly even make it around Florida and work its way up the east coast. The 'experts' still haven't worked that out yet, and they can't even really tell us what the likelihood of that might be, or how close it might come to the coast if it does work out that way. But even if it 'misses' the east coast and works its way up into the middle of the Atlantic ocean, is there really any doubt that it'll have an effect on the ecology of the ocean? I mean, c'mon, we're not the only ones here, ya know. The ocean is teeming with life. Everything from plankton (the major oxygen generator in the entire planet, remember) to squid to whales... and they're all part of the ecosystem. All part of what makes OUR lives possible.

Now, I'm not going to launch into a tirade about how necessary it is for us to "get off the fossil fuel teat", mostly because I have no alternative. As we find the need for more and more electricity for our air conditioners and computers and fax machines and our DVRs with their twinkling, eye-burning blue LEDs and all the transformers and inverters and rectifiers that 'leak' electricity when plugged in even when not in use, We're going to have to find sources for that electricity. I don't want to give up my lifestyle, just as I know YOU don't... and there are several billion other people out there who've either never had reliable access to that kind of energy, or have never encountered it at all. THEY are going to want a piece of the "good life pie" too, and sooner rather than later.

So what do we do? Build a nuclear reactor on every city block and wonder where to 'hide' the spent nuclear fuel later? Dam every river and kill off the wildlife there while we generate electricity? Hope that there's some miracle breakthrough in solar cells or an order-of-magnitude increase in the electricity to be squeezed from wind power?

I don't know. But the power we derive from fossil fuels now... from coal and petroleum and natural gas... provides almost all of our energy needs today, and if we could somehow both reduce our need for electricity through improved technology and conservation both, we could keep the wolves at bay for at least a while longer... perhaps long enough to find out how to efficiently harness the power of the sun.

I'm not talking about fusion reactors where it takes millions upon millions of dollars' worth of energy to just START generating energy. I'm talking about actually harnessing the power of the sun itself. I'm not hoping for a Dyson sphere or even a moon based collector of some sort, but maybe a couple of satellites that can catch and either convert or redirect all that energy. I mean, the sun puts out more energy every second than we humans have in our entire history on this planet. The trick is to be able to grab it and use it.

The unfortunate fact is that, right now, 'free' solar energy is expensive; much more expensive than generating electricity from coal. And if it weren't for the fact that there's just so much of it out there... so much pure energy emitted from the sun every second of every day with the only end in sight billions of years from now... if it weren't for that, it wouldn't even be worth talking about. But the sun IS there, and it IS pouring out massive amounts of energy. And it WILL be doing so, and at a slowly increasing rate, by the way... the sun will get hotter and hotter as it ages. And if our descendants... IF we have any.. don't find a way to mitigate that the Earth's oceans will slowly boil away and the Earth will be left unfit for us. So we'd really be doing our descendants a favor if we found a way to capture some of the sun's energy now. We really COULD be our children's heroes... Imagine that!

I'm going to wrap this up soon, but I do want to say one last thing... even if you're not worried about things like the Gulf oil spill, even if you're not concerned about disposing of nuclear waste, even if you're not worried about coal mine cave-ins or natural gas explosions, you might want to think about this: Wars will be fought over this.

Yes, they will. Mark my words. Regardless of what the talking heads on television say, wars are not fought over religion. They're fought over POWER. And in the coming decades, energy... power... will literally BE the power that wars will be fought over. Control of oil fields, coastal rights, natural gas fields will be what's important.

If nothing else... if for no other reason, wouldn't it be worthwhile to head off a conflict... multiple conflicts like that? Just something to think about.

Well, that's it for this time around, friends and neighbors. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Leaked Nintendo 3DS Prototype... Possible Widescreen?

This week, Gizmodo posted an image from an FCC filing submitted by Nintendo that appears to be an early prototype circuit board of the upcoming Nintendo 3DS handheld. While the design of the board will certainly change during development, there are a few interesting tidbits to be noted in the image.

The most conspicuous is the top screen, which looks to sport a widescreen aspect ratio. The prototype's bottom touch screen still appears to be the standard 4:3 ratio that current DS hardware has, though I imagine this will change prior to production and both screens will be widescreen. Whether backwards compatibility with existing DS titles will implement image-stretching or pillar-boxing to fill the new displays is unclear.

Another thing to note is that round, white component on the bottom-center of the logic board. While I can't say for certain based on the low-res picture, it sure looks like an analogue stick, doesn't it? I can't really imagine what else it could be, so here's hoping the 3DS will finally feature a proper thumb stick.

The Nintendo 3DS is said to feature autostereoscopic 3D displays which can produce 3D imagery without the use of 3D glasses. It will be backwards compatible with existing DS software, will have built-in force-feedback and improved wireless communication as well as battery

life. Nintendo 3DS is rumored to be released this October.

Rumorville: Sony To Unveil 'Premium' PSN Subscriptions?

One of Sony's biggest selling points for the PlayStation 3 is the free PlayStation Network, the PS3's online hub for gaming downloads, video rentals and multiplayer gaming. Now rumor has it that Sony is poised to start charging for "premium" PSN subscriptions, complete with such enticements as free monthly games and streaming music.

According to VG247, a "highly placed" source claims that Sony may unveil a "large-scale monetizing scheme" for the PlayStation Network as soon as next month's E3 gaming conference in Los Angeles, and that the new, paid PSN subscriptions could be a "major part" of Sony's E3 presentation - so big, says VG247, that we probably won't see another would-be Sony bombshell (the rumored PSP 2) - until later this year. (Bummer.)

Let me stress that this "premium" PSN chatter is only chatter. Then again, Kotaku points out that Sony was circulating a survey about paid PSN options just a few months ago. Anyway, back to the story. According to VG247 and its anonymous source, the premium PSN plan wouldn't foist charges on any existing free services on PSN, such as the online gaming and video stores and multiplayer matchmaking.

Instead, for what amounts to about \$72 a year, premium PSN subscribers would get to pick one free PSN game a month from a selection of two to four options, and might also get a music service similar to Pandora or Slacker that could stream tunes during a game.

Left unsaid in the VG247 story: the fate of several enticing features in the Sony survey mentioned by Kotaku, including the ability to back up your saved games in the "cloud," free access to PSOne and PSP "mini" titles and PS3 and PSP themes, and one-hour trials of full games. (Now, that would be cool.)

Sony has always flaunted its free PSN as a key selling point versus Xbox Live, Microsoft's online gaming service for the Xbox 360. Any Xbox 360 gamer can access Live's gaming and music stores with a free Silver membership, but you need a paid Gold subscription (starting at \$49 a year) to game online with your pals - a service that's free on the PlayStation Network.

An Xbox Gold membership is also required to share photos or stream Netflix videos, as well as to access Facebook, Twitter and the Last.FM streaming music service from the Xbox Dashboard.

Sony has neither confirmed nor denied any PSN "premium" plans.

Personally, I have no problem with the idea, so long as everything that's currently free on the PlayStation Network - particularly multiplayer matchmaking - remains free. And assuming the price is right, of course (maybe more like \$49 a year rather than \$70).

I'd probably be most interested in the premium features that weren't mentioned in the VG247 story, such as cloud-based storage for game saves (so long as you can keep a local copy as well) and the one-hour trials of full games.

Play Pac-Man on Google!

Happy 30th anniversary Pac-Man, Google style! If you haven't been to Google's homepage yet today, check it out now before it's gone.

Hint: It didn't look this hip when it debuted 30 years ago today.

Yep, it's a fully functional Pac-Man game with Google-stenciled islands in a wide-angle maze with the t-junction and ghost repository serving aptly as the second 'g'. There's even an extra power pill per level.

Controls? Your keyboard's arrow keys, what else? Tap the 'insert coin' button twice and you can play Ms. Pac-Man simultaneously using the W-A-S-D keys.

Does it have all 255 levels? The infamous split-screen "finale"? Other unexpected Google-styled easter eggs?

Guess we'll just have to play to find out.

Update: It'll be live for 48 hours, says Google, and apparently **does** include all 255 levels - even the glitchy 256th.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online      -          Online Users Growl & Purr!
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This Day in History: Atari Found Guilty in Landmark Nintendo Case

May 17, 1993: The legendary Atari v. Nintendo case comes to an end.

On this day in 1993, the lengthy antitrust battle between Atari and Nintendo came to a conclusion, with a Federal District Court Judge finding Atari guilty of violating Nintendo's patent relating to its security lockout chip.

The 10NES chip was Nintendo's security measure for preventing unauthorized game makers from manufacturing games for the Nintendo Entertainment System. It essentially acted as the "key" for a "lock" inside the NES itself - the chip on the cart would interact with the one in the console, and if they matched, the game would boot up. If they didn't, the NES would put itself in an endless reset cycle.

The reasoning for this was twofold - first to prevent the market from being flooded by crappy games, and second to make sure Nintendo got its (rather significant) cut of each game sold.

The story is long and complicated and far beyond the scope of this article, but here's the significantly shortened version: in 1989, Atari began

manufacturing its own NES games without Nintendo's permission, using a clone of the 10NES they called the Rabbit. It also immediately filed suit against Nintendo, claiming that its lockout of game manufacturers was a violation of antitrust laws.

Four years and several injunctions later, Judge Fern Smith of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco found Atari - not Nintendo - guilty of patent infringement. As it turned out, when Atari developed its Rabbit chip, it obtained a copy of the 10NES code illegally, by lying to the U.S. Copyright Office to obtain a copy of the code, which they then copied.

The decision was a landmark event not only in videogame history, but for programming in general, as it made clear that the work of a computer programmer is a creative work that is protected under the same rules as authors in other media.

Nintendo's press release from exactly 17 years ago, courtesy Business Wire, follows.

Time Warner unit guilty of copyright and patent infringement; federal court issues landmark decision

Time Warner's video game unit, Atari Games, has been found to infringe Nintendo's copyright and patent covering the security system for the Nintendo Entertainment System.

Nintendo had been granted a U.S. patent and copyright for its security system. The system prevents unlicensed third parties from producing game software for play on Nintendo's home video game systems.

Federal District Court Judge Fern Smith, in San Francisco, issued orders Monday granting Nintendo's motion for a summary judgment against Atari Games.

The Time Warner unit had previously been preliminarily enjoined by Smith. In the earlier decision Smith found that Atari Games' representatives had lied to the U.S. Copyright Office in order to obtain Nintendo's copyrighted computer "source code." Smith's decision was affirmed by the Federal Circuit last year.

In addition to finding patent infringement, the new decision finds substantial similarity between protected portions of the computer code found in all Nintendo video game cartridges and the computer code contained in video game cartridges manufactured by Atari Games.

The decision is of far-reaching importance in the evolving area of copyright law as it relates to computer programs. Until now, the courts have cast considerable doubt over the scope of protection for computer programs under the Copyright Act, despite Congress' clear directive that they are to be protected just as any other literary work.

This decision makes clear that an infringer cannot copy the creative work of a computer programmer any more than that of authors in other media.

While there are unique aspects of computer program works that give rise to complex issues with respect to their copyrightability, the federal court in this case was able to cut through thousands of pages of testimony and hundreds of pages of legal argument. It found that the deliberate copying of programming expression by Atari Games and Tengen

could not be excused under any fair reading of the Copyright Act.

Howard Lincoln, Nintendo's senior vice president, said: "Time Warner's unit has not dealt honorably with our company. It stole our intellectual property rights. We are pleased the court has now vindicated our position."

Nintendo's counsel, John Kirby of Mudge Rose Guthrie Alexander & Ferdon, said, "The court's ruling is not only a landmark in the copyright law and of major importance in the computer industry, but it also is a landmark in this litigation that affirms Nintendo's determination to protect its intellectual property rights against those who might have believed that the law had turned its back on owners of such property rights."

The court's decision leaves certain issues to be resolved at trial, including Nintendo's claim that Atari Games' infringement was willful and Atari Games' claims with respect to the validity of Nintendo's patent.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Facebook Prepping Changes to Privacy Policy

Facebook on Friday confirmed that it will soon introduce changes to its privacy policies intended to make them easier to understand, though it's unlikely the move will include the sweeping changes some privacy advocates have requested.

"The messages we've received are pretty clear. Users appreciate having precise and comprehensive controls, but want them to be simpler and easier to use. They also like the new programs we have rolled out, but want simple and easy ways to opt out of sharing personal information with applications and Web sites through Facebook Platform," a Facebook spokesman said in a statement. "We're listening to this input and incorporating it into innovations we hope to announce shortly."

The company did not provide details on when this announcement would be made, but said it has "spent the last couple of weeks" listening to user feedback and meeting with experts in California, Washington, D.C., and around the world.

"We know Facebook is well known for its innovations around sharing and we want to be equally known for innovations around user control," the spokesman said.

The most recent concerns about Facebook's privacy policies date back to December, when the company rolled out new privacy settings intended to give users more control over their settings. But given Facebook's move

toward a more open format as it integrates status updates with search engines like Google and Bing, the site encouraged its users to make more of their data public, and made some of the default settings more open.

That prompted nearly a dozen privacy and consumer organizations to ask the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate. The FTC later said the inquiry was of "particular interest" to them, but the agency has not taken any action.

Last month, at its annual f8 developer conference, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg discussed an "open graph" that would connect the social graphs created by users on sites like Yelp or Pandora and combine them for a larger, more social picture.

That prompted members of Congress, privacy watchdogs, and the Article 29 Working Party to express their concern about the new policies, though again, no definitive action has been taken. Many detractors are requesting that Facebook provide users with a better explanation of how their information is being used, and gain express consent from members before rolling out new features.

Recently, two Toronto-based Facebook users set up a Web site at quitfacebookday.com, urging other Facebook users to cancel their accounts on May 31.

"For us it comes down to two things: fair choices and best intentions. In our view, Facebook doesn't do a good job in either department," Matthew Milan and Joseph Dee wrote on the site. "Facebook gives you choices about how to manage your data, but they aren't fair choices, and while the onus is on the individual to manage these choices, Facebook makes it damn difficult for the average user to understand or manage this. We also don't think Facebook has much respect for you or your data, especially in the context of the future."

Milan and Dee suggest Ning, Orkut, or Akoha as alternatives, though Ning recently announced that it would be phasing out its free service, so that might not be the best alternative to Facebook.

MySpace Unveils 'Simplified' Privacy Controls

Perhaps a bit late to the party, MySpace on Monday said it would soon implement a privacy upgrade that provides users with more control over who can see their profiles.

In the next few weeks, MySpace said it will simplify its privacy settings to let users display their profile information to the public, friends only, or to users over 18. Settings will default to "friends only" for anyone who previously had any granular page settings to "friends only," co-president Mike Jones wrote in a blog post.

In December, Facebook replaced its regional networks with four basic control settings: friends; friends of friends; everyone; and customized.

"While we've had these plans in the works for some time, given the recent outcry over privacy concerns in the media, we felt it was important to unveil those plans to our users now," Jones wrote. "We believe users want a simpler way to control their privacy."

While Jones did not specifically name-check Facebook in his post, he is likely referring to the rival social networking site's recent troubles regarding its upgraded privacy policies.

At its f8 developer conference last month, Facebook introduced the concept of an "open graph," which is intended to create a larger, more social Facebook community across the Web. It also introduced "Community Pages" intended to provide information about various topics.

The changes have been criticized by consumer groups, members of Congress, privacy watchdogs, and the Article 29 Working Party because, the groups say, Facebook has not done enough to inform users about how their information is being used.

"MySpace early on recognized the issues facing a website with a massive global population and we've taken our responsibilities seriously," Jones wrote. "We take a holistic approach to safety, security and privacy and align our product and practices around the needs of our users, while at the same time working closely with industry experts, law enforcement, regulators, and safety and privacy advocates."

The new MySpace privacy settings can be altered under the "Privacy" section of account settings.

Judge Permanently Shuts Down ISP Catering to Spam, Porn

A U.S. district court judge has ordered the permanent closure of an Internet service provider long accused of hosting and distributing spam, spyware, child pornography and other illegal content, at the request of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.

Judge Ronald Whyte of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Jose has ordered that the computer servers and other assets owned by Pricewert, doing business as 3FN.net, be sold by a court-appointed receiver. Whyte also ordered the company to turn over US\$1.08 million in illegal profits to the FTC, according to court documents.

Whyte's orders, dated April 8, were made public by the FTC Wednesday.

Several security experts supported the FTC's case against 3FN, Whyte wrote in a disgorgement order. "These experts had analyzed data derived from internet searches which establish that defendant, an internet service provider, was engaged in widespread illegal activity," he wrote. "There seems to be little doubt from the information provided that Pricewert functioned primarily as an internet service provider for illegal activity."

There were a "relatively small number of apparently legitimate customers" of the company, Whyte wrote.

The FTC, in June, charged that 3FN actively recruited criminals to distribute spyware, viruses, Trojan horses, phishing e-mails and pornography featuring children and animals. The company, doing business under several names, advertised its services in a variety of underground sites, including a chat room for spammers, the FTC charged.

The company's distribution of illegal and malicious content and deployment of botnets compromised thousands of computers and was an unfair business practice, the FTC alleged.

The Pricewert.com and 3FN.net Web sites were down Wednesday. An e-mail to the contact person for Pricewert listed on whois bounced back.

Whyte issued a temporary restraining order against the San Jose company in June. That order prohibited 3FN's upstream Internet providers and data centers from providing services to the ISP.

Spam volume on the Internet dropped by 15 percent following the June shutdown, security vendor M86 Security said.

In June, Pricewert spokesman Max Christopher complained that the FTC was "blaming providers for bad customer actions."

The ISP "shielded its criminal clientele" by ignoring take-down requests from the online security community and by shifting the Internet Protocol addresses of criminals in order to avoid detection, the FTC alleged.

The FTC also alleged that 3FN operated large botnets and recruited so-called bot herders to run the networks of compromised computers. Botnets are often used to send spam and launch denial-of-service attacks.

Transcripts of instant-message logs filed with the district court show the company's senior employees discussing the configuration of botnets with bot herders, the FTC said. More than 4,500 malicious software programs were controlled by command-and-control servers hosted by 3FN, the FTC alleged in court documents.

This malware included programs capable of keystroke logging, password stealing, and data theft, programs with hidden backdoor remote control activity, and programs involved in spam distribution.

The defendants named in the FTC's complaint are Pricewert, also doing business as 3FN.net, Triple Fiber Network, APS Telecom, APX Telecom, APS Communications, and APS Communication.

Among the groups assisting the FTC in the case were the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Office of Inspector General, Computer Crime Division; Gary Warner, director of research in Computer Forensics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham; The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children; The Shadowserver Foundation; Symantec; and The Spamhaus Project.

Apple Refreshes MacBook Line After Leak

Apple introduced its newest MacBook entry-level laptops Tuesday featuring a faster processor and longer battery life. The new model has a 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor and 2GB of RAM. The release of the MacBook comes days after Vietnamese site posted leaked details regarding the notebook this past weekend.

There are no changes to the exterior of the new MacBooks. Inside though, the new notebooks come with 250GB of storage and an upgraded battery,

which Apple claims it can last up to ten hours on a single charge. Despite the improvements, Apple maintained the price of the new MacBooks at \$999.

The graphics on the new white MacBooks also come in line with its 13-inch Pro sibling, ditching the NVIDIA GeForce 9400M for an NVIDIA GeForce 320M. This update narrows the \$200 gap between the 13-inch MacBook Pro and white MacBook, with the main differences remaining the metal chassis, more RAM, and an SD card slot.

Vietnamese blogs have been the source of upcoming Apple gear leaks, after the widely publicised case of the Gizmodo iPhone 4G unveiling. The Taoviet forum showed pictures and videos of the new iPhone expected this summer, which unlike Gizmodo's prototype, it was a later model.

The new MacBook introduced on Tuesday was leaked on another Vietnamese blog, Tinhte, showing the updated specs a few days before Apple, sometime during the past Saturday. The videos from the Vietnamese site also show that the new MacBook will come with a different AC adaptor, similar to the one found on the Pro and Air lines. We cannot confirm this information however, until the new MacBooks actually ship to consumers.

It is unknown how Tinhte and Taoviet actually got hold of the unreleased Apple hardware, but their leaks proved to be true in the case of the new MacBook and confirm the new iPhone 4G design, first exposed over at Gizmodo. What is a given though, is that Apple cannot be very happy about these leaks from Vietnam, considering the snafu the company is making back in the U.S. over the alleged misappropriation of the iPhone 4G prototype.

Microsoft Upgrade Aims To Make Hotmail Cool Again

Microsoft Corp. is trying to make Hotmail cool again.

The free Web mail service soon will be switching to a new approach that Microsoft hopes will give Hotmail an edge over rival offerings from Yahoo Inc. and Google Inc.

The upgrade, expected to be available in July or August, will automatically sort incoming messages into different categories devoted to users' key contacts and Internet social networks. It will also provide previews of incoming photos, videos and other material without having to open an attachment or click on a link.

Other tools are being added to make it less cumbersome to send photos, videos, documents and other attachments to e-mail recipients. Another tweak is supposed to make it easier to sync Hotmail on mobile phones.

It's all part of the most extensive overhaul to Hotmail since Microsoft bought the service 12 years ago, said Chris Jones, a Microsoft executive who is overseeing the renovations.

"Our service wasn't doing the best job that it could," Jones said during a Monday preview of the makeover.

The new features are supposed to enable people to spend less time managing their inboxes and more time enjoying and digesting what's in

the messages.

Microsoft is hoping the added convenience will help overcome the perception that Hotmail was growing stale as Google and Yahoo added more bells and whistles to their free Web mail services.

Even as it made relatively few changes, Hotmail remained the world's most used service with 360 million users, according to statistics compiled by comScore Inc. Yahoo ranks second globally with about 284 million users followed by Google's Gmail at 173 million users.

Now Microsoft thinks it might have shot of supplanting Yahoo as the top Web mail service in the U.S. (Yahoo's e-mail service has 95 million U.S. users compared to 47 million for Hotmail and 43 million for Gmail, according to comScore).

Hotmail's most significant changes will provide new ways to look at photos and videos sent through e-mail. Microsoft expects this feature to be particularly popular because it says 55 percent of Hotmail's storage is consumed by photos sent as attachments.

The new technology will detect when an e-mail contains a photo attachment and automatically display a thumbnail of the image (or images) at the top of the message. Hotmail will provide similar previews when it detects links to photo-sharing sites Flickr and SmugMug or to video-sharing sites YouTube and Hulu.

Other changes are designed to make it easier to send photos, video and other Web content. A new insert bar will allow users to send up to 10 gigabytes - about 200 photos each containing 50 megabytes - by uploading them to Microsoft's free online storage service Skydrive, where they can only be viewed by the recipients of the e-mail.

Videos and other Internet material can be found through a new panel that will connect Hotmail to Microsoft's Internet search engine, Bing. The videos and other Bing-generated content can then be inserted into an e-mail with a mouse click. The e-mail recipient will then be able to see the video or other material without having to click through a Web link.

As it spruces up Hotmail, Microsoft also will try to make it more secure. Embracing a change recently made by Gmail, Microsoft is adding a so-called "secure sockets layer" (denoted by "https" before a Web address) that encrypts e-mail to make it less vulnerable to computer hackers.

YouTube Celebrates Birthday with a Five-Year Channel

In a future history of media, YouTube's fifth birthday may mark the point when Internet video became a grown-up, next to its older sibling, television. The popular video site marked its birthday Sunday and touted its more than two billion views every day.

"That's nearly double the prime-time audience for all three major U.S. television networks combined," the site noted on its official blog. The YouTube figure includes its international viewers.

YouTube said that "what started as a site for bedroom vloggers and viral

videos has evolved into a global platform that supports HD and 3-D, broadcasts entire sports sessions live in 200+ countries," and delivers Hollywood features, independent films, and videos that document social unrest. The first video ever uploaded to the site, called Me at the Zoo, was posted shortly before the launch by cofounder Jawed Karim, and was 19 seconds long. In 2006, the "site for bedroom vloggers" was purchased for \$1.65 billion by Google.

Since then, the site has taken an increasingly prominent position in the culture. Some videos, for instance, have achieved instant classic status, including Susan Boyle's performance on Britain's Got Talent competition, Barack Obama's YouTube videos, and daily uploads of videos from the Iranian election protests.

Appropriately, to celebrate its fifth birthday, the site is starting a Five Year channel, with video stories of how YouTube has "changed or shaped" people's lives. One story, for instance, features a Hawaii teen who began posting his short fictional movies and later changed his major to film in college. There's also an interview with Jessica Rose, the actress who played 16-year-old Bree in the hit fake-diary series, Lonely Girl 15.

YouTube asked guest curators to pick their favorites - Net pioneer Vint Cerf, news anchor Katie Couric, talk-show host Conan O'Brien, and film director Pedro Almodovar. Among the videos picked by Couric is Virginia Sen. George Allen making his "macaca" comment - a captured moment which many observers think contributed to his electoral defeat.

O'Brien's include Pinky the Cat, a video where a cat turns vicious moments after the owner has heaped praise on the animal sitting in his lap. Vint Cerf's favorites include the Boston Dynamics BIGDOG Robot and an explanation of Einstein's relativity theory.

The difference in the time window that users devote to YouTube compared to television is still large. The average user spends 15 minutes a day on YouTube, compared to an average of five hours daily that people spend watching TV.

The site is actively trying to increase viewing time by adding longer fare, and by making it easier to sort through and find videos. As is increasingly the case with TV, finding what to watch in the huge YouTube store of content is a key issue. Every minute, a day's worth of video is uploaded to YouTube.

YouTube's place in the media landscape may begin to change again this week if Google introduces its much-awaited Google TV as expected, and devices that combine the web with high-definition TV become popular.

Michael McGuire, an analyst with industry research firm Gartner, said "there's no doubt YouTube has gone from being a time-wasting pastime to a significant part of the media landscape."

But he noted that comparing views of videos on YouTube with viewership on TV is "apples and oranges." Among other things, McGuire said, "the economics haven't shifted yet, and the amount of ad money on TV still dwarfs that on the Net." And, he said, TV still "dominates in terms of sheer time that people spending watching it."

What YouTube and other video sites have done, he said, is add new expectations for how to watch video, and "underscored in consumers'

minds the benefits of having control" over what to watch and when.

Angry Users Seek Better Alternatives To Facebook

One drawback of building a huge social-networking community like Facebook is the intensity of that community when it gets mad at management. At the popular networking site, that anger - over what some users perceive to be an erosion of their privacy - is bubbling up in very public ways.

For example, four New York University computer-science students are attempting to build a social-networking site that would value user privacy more highly than they believe Facebook does. In late April, they set themselves a minimum goal of raising \$10,000, to pay for basic living expenses while they wrote code. They were able to raise that amount from online donors in 12 days. Within three weeks, as of Monday, they had raised nearly \$175,000 from about 4,600 donors.

The open-source, free software they are developing is called Diaspora. "We're going to build a great lightweight decentralized social-networking framework," write the four on their web site, joindiaspora.com. They added that they've also received offers of help from "a massive number of talented and experienced people."

There have also been publicized efforts by some users to delete their Facebook accounts and encourage others to do so. Web tech pundit Leo Laporte, for instance, has made public his efforts to delete his account - and the convoluted efforts required to do so. Others have similarly publicized their attempts to quit Facebook, such as Google's search spam expert Matt Cutts and Engadget cofounder Peter Rojas. The effort has gathered enough interest that, on Google, entering "How do I" leads to "How do I delete my Facebook account" as the first auto-complete suggestion.

In a recent question-and-answer article with Facebook users in The New York Times, Facebook Vice President for Public Policy Elliot Schrage said "we don't share your information with advertisers." He added that the targeting is anonymous and names are not shared or identified.

If an advertiser wants to target users interested in boats, Schrage said, ad impressions are served to people with "boats" somewhere on their profile, but no names or other personal information is provided.

But that message has been somewhat less than clear. "We're building toward a web where the default is social," Facebook cofounder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg said late last month during the kickoff announcement of Open Graph in San Francisco. "Every application and product will be redesigned from the ground up to use a person's real identity and friends."

Open Graph makes a user's likes and dislikes available on partner sites. "Like" buttons, which have quickly become famous, are placed on partner sites to reflect the user's interest in the site, photos, blog posts, songs and similar content. Clicking on the Like button makes that information become viewable by a user's friends - and, in the aggregate, to sponsors.

Users have complained in particular that opting out of such participation requires a complex navigation of a series of menus, and

that policies and functionalities keep changing. The perception of Facebook's attitude toward privacy wasn't helped by Zuckerberg's comments earlier in the year to the effect that, if he were creating Facebook today, users' private information would be public by default.

Michael Gartenberg, a partner and analyst with the Altimeter Group, said "it's interesting how fast Facebook has gone from being an industry darling to getting beaten up."

Despite the high visibility of several Facebook critics and quitters, he noted, they're currently "a relatively insignificant number" of the site's 400 million members.

Google Tells Sites for Cougars to Go Prowl Elsewhere

IF you're a woman who would like to date younger men, you can find lots of articles about these relationships by doing a Google search.

But as a woman looking for a man, you might be a little confused by the advertisements that accompany these articles. One promises to help you find sexy Latin women, and another, hot Latvian ladies. But there are no links to the growing number of "cougar" dating sites, matching older women with younger men, on content sites that show up in a Google search. Google has recently deemed those dating sites "nonfamily safe," and therefore its ads for such sites containing the word "cougar" will not be allowed on so-called content pages.

The Google advertising system has two components: one for ads that appear next to search results, and one for its content network. For a company like CougarLife.com <<http://CougarLife.com>>, now banned from the content network, that means its ads will no longer appear on more than 6,700 Web sites, including Ask.com, YouTube and MySpace, which accounted for 60 percent of its traffic, said Thomas Koshy, vice president for marketing at CougarLife, a Toronto-based site that says it has a half-million members, men and women.

Google continues to allow similar advertising for the many sites that match older men and younger women, like DateAMillionaire.com, which assures its clients they can meet "sugar babies."

So cougars and cubs are out, but sugar daddies and sugar babies are in.

Blurbs and 'sponsored links,' which typically pop up on the right side of the screen, for dating sites like CougarLife.com and other 'nonfamily' sites (one screams "Date a hot cheating wife!") will still appear along with a list of search results.

Google, which has more than a million advertisers, would not comment on why sugar-daddy sites are still considered family safe, but cougar sites are not. The company's decision, made public this week by CougarLife.com, has rankled not only advertisers but women who have embraced the cougar concept as a symbol of empowerment, of older women bucking dating stereotypes.

Many feminists still take issue with the word 'cougar' because it may conjure the image of a predatory, aggressive older woman on the hunt for a boy toy. And plenty of cougar dating Web sites are salacious, as are

other dating sites.

With television shows like 'Cougar Town,' many movie plots based on these May-December romances (not always portraying cougars in a positive light) and a steady stream of tabloid reports on the comings and goings of celebrities like Demi Moore, the concept has taken hold in pop culture.

But that's a far cry from a societal stamp of approval. Experts on female sexuality and women's history say Google's decision provides a glimpse into a pervasive discomfort with older women as sexually active players on the dating scene.

"It's relatively new that women have felt O.K. to be sexual and be attractive and continue to be alive in that way as they aged," said Lonnie Barbach, a psychologist in San Francisco who specializes in female sexuality and relationships. "It's always been an acceptable part of culture for men to be sexual at all ages and all levels."

Last week, CougarLife.com, which was paying Google \$100,000 a month to manage its advertising and place it on content pages, was notified by the company that its ads, which had been appearing since October, would no longer be accepted.

Google confirmed that 'cougar' would now automatically place a site into the adult category, but would not say which other words would do that.

"We can't comment on specific advertisers, but our policy is that adult dating ads are classified as nonfamily-safe, meaning that they will not show on the Google Content Network," the company said in an e-mail message.

When notified by Google of the decision, CougarLife proposed substituting a different ad for the ones that were running, picturing older women and younger men together. Cougarlife said it would use an image of the company's president, Claudia Opdenkelder, 39, without a man in the picture (she lives with her 25-year-old boyfriend).

But the advertising department was told in an e-mail message from its Google representative that "the policy is focused particularly around the concept of cougar dating as a whole," and asked if the company would be open to changing "the cougar theme/language specifically (including the domain if necessary)." CougarLife forwarded the e-mail messages to The New York Times. Google would not comment on the messages but did confirm that they were consistent with the new policy on cougar sites.

"It's just wrong all around," Ms. Opdenkelder said. "It's age and gender discrimination. It's just about older, successful, independent, strong women who enjoy someone that's younger. Some of the men sites, they are borderline prostitution, and Google has no problem having them advertise." CougarLife said it was considering filing a discrimination complaint with a Canadian agency that oversees equality issues between private parties, and was looking into possible legal recourse in the United States.

CougarLife.com is owned by Avid Life Media, which also owns ArrangementSeekers.com, which describes itself as 'the original Sugar Daddy service catering to ambitious and attractive girls seeking successful and generous benefactors to fulfill their lifestyle needs!'

Avid Life Media executives said that while some specific advertisements

for the ArrangementSeekers site had been rejected, the ads were evaluated on a case-by-case basis and the site was still advertising with Google.

Mr. Koshy of CougarLife.com said his site was, however, continuing to advertise on Facebook, spending \$100,000 monthly. Facebook, he said, had objected to some specific content of proposed ads but had not objected to the cougar concept.

A Facebook spokeswoman said there was no 'broad ban on cougar ads, but that any advertisement's 'image and language cannot be overtly provocative or sexual.' In the messages to CougarLife, Google said it might revisit the new policy. But for now, the cougars would be confined.

New Risk Threatens Internet Cafe Denizens

Canadian university researchers on Friday warned of a new strain of advertising software that can sneak onto laptop computers linked to wireless networks at Internet cafes.

University of Calgary computer science researchers have branded the potentially infectious ad software "Typhoid adware" for its ability to spread in public through unsuspecting laptop users.

"We're looking at a different variant of adware which we haven't seen out there yet but we believe could be a threat soon," said associate professor John Aycock, who co-authored a Typhoid research paper.

Adware is software typically sneaked onto people's computers when they download booby-trapped files such as screen savers or browser tool bars.

Once on machines, the programs barrage users with pop-up advertisements.

"Typhoid adware is designed for public places where people bring their laptops," says Aycock. "It's far more covert, displaying advertisements on computers that don't have the adware installed, not the ones that do."

A "carrier" laptop infected with Typhoid inserts advertisements in videos or Web pages on other computers using hotspots, according to the research.

"Not only are ads annoying but they can also advertise rogue antivirus software that's harmful to your computer, so ads are in some sense the tip of the iceberg," Aycock said.

Rogue antivirus software is used to con people into paying to fix computer problems that don't exist, steal identity information, and infect machines with malicious programs.

Internet cafe Web surfers can protect themselves by making certain online videos being watched are from the original sources and adjusting computer settings to be more wary of contact from other computers, researchers said.

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